

REMARKS

Examiner's permission is respectfully requested to amend drawing Fig. 14 as indicated by the marked up drawing sheet. Support for the amendment of the drawings can be found 5 on page 27, line 14, of the specification.

Formal drawings are submitted with this response to the Office Action. It is respectfully submitted that the formal drawings have incorporated the requested amendment to the drawings.

10 The specification is amended to correct typographic errors and informality therein. A marked-up version of the amended paragraphs in the specification is presented in Appendix A attached to this response to Office Action.

15 Claims 1-26 have been amended and remain pending in the subject application. A marked up version of the amended claims is presented in Appendix B attached to this response to Office Action.

Objection to Drawings

The drawings are objected to for improper numbers, 20 letters, and reference characters. By this amendment, permission to amend the drawings is respectfully requested and the specification has been amended. It is believed that the requested amendment to the drawings and the amendment to specification have overcome the objection to the drawings.

Rejection of Claims 1-26 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 1-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Klein et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,726,885, herein after referred to as "Klein") in view of Carr (U.S. Patent No. 5,066,034, herein after referred to as "Carr") and further in view of Taft (U.S. Patent No. 5,579,973, herein after referred to as "Taft"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Klein discloses a hiring vehicle transportation system (Fig. 1) comprised of a disposition center (Z) and automatic collection and return machines (HA). Klein also discloses in column 5, lines 58-63, that the collection and return occupation function determines how many vehicles are in transit and how many vehicles are freely available or reserved at the respective collection and return point. Whenever a user makes a vehicle request, this function determines whether the desired vehicle is available at the desired location at the desired time. It is respectfully submitted that Klein neither teaches nor suggests anything related to relocating vehicles between different automatic collection and return machines (HA) in order to satisfy user requests for vehicles.

Carr discloses a car towing apparatus with a surge brake system. Taft discloses a carrier for lightweight two wheel vehicles, with capability for also towing a trailer. It is also respectfully submitted that neither Carr nor Taft teaches or suggests anything related to relocating vehicles between different vehicle ports in a vehicle sharing system.

Claim 1 calls for, among other things, a computer system programmed for defining a first VSG of the first port;

in response to no vehicle in the first VSG, defining a second VSG of a second port; in response to at least one vehicle in the second VSG, selecting a vehicle therefrom; and in response to selecting a vehicle from the second VSG, generating a

5 relocation request of the selected vehicle from the second port to the first port. A combination of these elements and the other elements specified in claim 1 is neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination. Therefore, claim 1 is allowable over Klein in

10 view of Carr and further in view of Taft.

Claims 2-7 depend from claim 1 and are therefore allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft for at least the same reasons as claim 1. Claim 3 further sets out that said computer system is further

15 programmed for including in the first VSG vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period. Claim 7 further sets out a display device for displaying the relocation request to an attendant of the second port in response to said computer system generating a relocation

20 request. At least the combinations of these elements and the other elements specified in claims 3 and 7 are neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination, further precluding the obviousness of claims 3 and 7 under 35 U.S.C. § 103.

25 Claim 8 calls for, among other things, defining a first VSG for the first port and a second VSG for a second port; selecting a vehicle from the second VSG in response to no suitable vehicle present in the first VSG; and relocating the selected vehicle from the second port to the first port in

30 response to selecting a vehicle from the second VSG. It is

respectfully submitted that a combination of these elements and the other elements specified in claim 8 is neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination. Therefore, claim 8 is allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft.

Claims 9-14 depend from claim 8 and are therefore allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft for at least the same reasons as claim 8. Claim 10 further sets out including vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period in the first VSG. Claim 13 further sets out displaying a relocation message to an attendant of the second port. At least the combinations of these elements and the other elements specified in claims 10 and 13 are neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination, further precluding the obviousness of claims 10 and 13 under 35 U.S.C. § 103.

Claim 15 calls for, among other things, a computer system programmed to determine a number of vehicles in a first search depth VSG of a first port and, in responses thereto, to determine whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port. A combination of these elements and the other elements specified in claim 15 is neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination. Therefore, claim 15 is allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft.

Claims 16-20 depend from claim 15 and are therefore allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft for at least the same reasons as claim 15. Claim 17 further sets out that the first search depth VSG further includes vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a

preset time period based on the search depth. Claim 20 further sets out a port attendant display device coupled for communication with said computer system and adapted for displaying a relocation message to an attendant of the second port. At least the combinations of these elements and the other elements specified in claims 17 and 20 are neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination, further precluding the obviousness of claims 17 and 20 under 35 U.S.C. § 103.

Claim 21 calls for, among other things, defining a first VSG for a first port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time, and a second VSG for a second port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time; and determining a number of available vehicles in the first VSG of and, based on the number of available vehicles in the first VSG, determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port. A combination of these elements and the other elements specified in claim 21 is neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft, either singly or in combination. Therefore, claim 21 is allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft.

Claims 22-26 depend from claim 21 and are therefore allowable over Klein in view of Carr and further in view of Taft for at least the same reasons as claim 21. Claim 23 further sets out that determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated comprises determining whether the number of vehicles within the designated area is below a preset value. Claim 24 further sets out that determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated comprises determining

whether the number of available vehicles in the first VSG is below a preset value. At least the combinations of these elements and the other elements specified in claims 23 and 24 are neither taught nor suggested by Klein, Carr, and Taft,
5 either singly or in combination, further precluding the obviousness of claims 23 and 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 103.

CONCLUSION

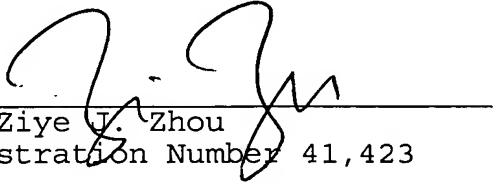
In view of above, claims 1-26 currently pending in the subject application are believed to be allowable and the
10 subject application is in condition for allowance. Such action is respectfully requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees to Manatt, Phelps & Phillips' Deposit Account No. 13-1241 or to credit any overpayment to the same for all
15 matters during the prosecution of the subject application.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX A

MARKED UP VERSION OF AMENDED PARAGRAPHS IN THE SPECIFICATION

The paragraph on page 14, between line 3 and line 21:

A port facility can contain a plurality of charging facilities 169 (shown in Figs. 6 and 8) that are used to recharge the batteries of electrical vehicles. Typically battery/charging systems for electrical vehicles have a characteristic as shown in the SOC versus time graph 210 as shown in Fig. 11. Between points 212 and 214 on the graph, the charging of the battery is essentially linear. Between points 214 and 216, the charging of the battery approaches 100% charge exponentially and therefore the amount of charge obtained per unit time decreases. By allocating vehicles with a higher state of charge to users, instead of merely allocating vehicles with a sufficient charge for the users requested use, the vehicles within a central facility will tend to be used before the charge point 214 on the graph is reached. By charging vehicles in the linear region between points 212 and 214, more effective use of the charging facilities is made than by charging vehicles in the range between points 214 and 216. This method of allocating vehicles with the highest charge, however, may be modified, as previously described, in order to provide vehicles for long trip use (i.e. vehicles charged between 214 and 216 on the state of charge graph). In cases where vehicles for long trips are needed the vehicles with the second highest charge could be allocated for use in order to preserve the most highly charged vehicle for the long trip user. In cases where

a greater demand for long trip vehicles was present, the vehicle with the second highest charge might also be reserved. The allocation of vehicles can be modified by statistical or simulated vehicle use in order to make the most efficient use
5 of charging facilities, while at the same time attempting to accommodate the need for vehicles with high state of charge for long trips.

The paragraph on page 16, between line 8 and line 23:

Vehicles may be relocated from one port facility to
10 another in a variety of manners. For example, an attendant may simply drive the vehicle from one facility to the other. However, the attendant performing the relocation would then be displaced from his original location. Accordingly, two attendants may drive two vehicles [to] from one port to the
15 next, leave one vehicle at the destination port and then both attendants may return to their original port in the other one of the two vehicles. However, that process requires two attendants to transport a vehicle between facilities.

Accordingly, in a preferred embodiment, some or all of the
20 vehicles within the fleet are provided with towing bar connectors and each port facility is provided with towing bars for connecting two vehicles together. In this manner, one vehicle may be readily connected to another and towed to a remote port facility by a single attendant. The attendant may
25 then disconnect the connected vehicles, leave one of the vehicles for the user and return to the original port facility with the other one of the two vehicles. Alternatively a secondary vehicle, for example a motor scooter, may be secured to the second vehicle. The motor scooter can, upon delivery

of the vehicles, be used to transport both the attendant and the towing bar equipment thus allowing the two connected vehicles to remain at the destination port while the attendant and the towing equipment depart.

5 The paragraph on page 18, between line 3 and line 11:

If the identification information received from the central facility matches the identification information (card key or token) entered by the user, [then] the user is allowed access to the vehicle, as shown in step 74, and a counter stops [starts] timing a preset time period, such as five minutes, as shown in step 76. In preferred embodiments, the vehicle subsystem employs an electronic door lock that is controlled to selectively unlock the vehicle, step 78, to allow access to the vehicle interior. In addition, counters within the vehicle subsystem are set and started for counting the number attempts of entering a personal identification number PIN, step 80, and for timing a preset time period by which a correct PIN must be entered, such as 200 seconds, step 82.

20 The paragraph between page 18, line 24, and page 19, line 23:

In one preferred embodiment both the user's identification data and PIN are read from a user's identification card and communicated to the vehicle to be allocated to the particular user. As soon as the user's identification data and PIN are communicated to the vehicle to be allocated to the particular user, an authorized user may drive the vehicle on a trip without any further communication between the vehicle and the central facility. Upon use of the proper identification card and entry of a correct [pin] PIN

within the vehicle, the vehicle is ready to drive. The identification card reader 242 may be located on a window as shown Fig. 13. The PIN entry is accomplished by means of an input and display device, which may be mounted in a center console within the vehicle as shown in Fig. 13. In another preferred embodiment, the determination of whether the entered PIN is correct or not is made at the central facility, for additional security. In this case the valid [pin] PIN is not sent to the vehicle, instead the user in the vehicle enters a PIN which is then sent to the central facility for validity determination. If the PIN is valid, [then] the central facility sends a notification of valid PIN to the vehicle. In particular, the central facility 12 preferably includes or operates with a database, table, algorithm, number encoded on the user's identification card, or the like which associates each user's identification information (card key or token) with the user's personal identification number PIN.

Accordingly, upon receiving the requesting user's identification information, the central facility 12 obtains that user's PIN, for example, by comparing the identification information with corresponding data base entries and reading PIN information associated in a database with the identification information. Furthermore, when the user enters a PIN in the user interface and display device in the vehicle, steps 86 or 100, the vehicle subsystem transmits the entered PIN to the central facility. The central facility then compares the PIN received from the vehicle subsystem with the PIN retrieved from the database, table, algorithm, user's identification card, or the like. If a sufficient match exists, [then] the user is considered to have entered a

correct PIN. The central facility may then send an enabling command to the vehicle, acknowledging that a correct PIN has been entered at the vehicle and the vehicle may be driven.

The correct [pin] PIN can be maintained in the vehicle

5 subsystem 18 for later identification of the user and enabling of the vehicle, even if the vehicle were not in communication with the central facility.

The paragraph between page 26, line 14, and page 27, line 13:

In preferred embodiments, the system 10 in Fig. 1
10 includes a plurality of port facility 14 located in geographically remote locations relative to each other, for example, at locations convenient for a large number of potential users, such as near train or bus stations, campuses, office parks, shopping areas or the like. Two examples of
15 vehicle distribution port facility 14 are shown in Figs. 6 and 8[, respectively]. In the example embodiments of Figs. 6 and 8, the vehicle distribution port [10] facility 14 [10] includes parking spaces 156 for parking a plurality of vehicles 16. In addition, the distribution port facility 14 [10] includes a
20 computer subsystem 158 typically located at a kiosk 14 to facilitate user interaction. Fig. 7 shows a generalized block diagram representation of the computer subsystem 158, which includes a computer 160, a display and user interface device 162, and a communications interface 164 for
25 communication with the central facility 12. The communications interface 164 may be, for example, a satellite, radio frequency RF or other wireless link, in which case, the interface 164 would include a transmitter/receiver. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the interface 164

between the central office facility and the subsystem 158 may comprise a hard wired connection, such as through computers linked to the Internet. Such a preferred embodiment is illustrated in Fig. 14. In Fig. 14, the user's interface to the system is a kiosk containing a computer, display screen, and one or more input devices such as a card reader and a keyboard and touch screen. A kiosk computer 250 serves as a web client connected to the Internet. The system control computer 254 serves several functions, for example as the registration web-server 256 process computer, it also provides a monitoring and control process 264 for the system. The registration web-server 256 serves the kiosk [250] computer 250 web clients. The registration web-server 256 also allows access to the registration web-server 256 by other computers connected to the Internet. Having a web connection not only simplifies the connection of the kiosk [250] computer(s) 250 to the system by allowing the kiosk web clients 250 to be located anywhere there is a ready connection to the Internet, it allows access to the vehicle sharing system from other Internet connected computers. This is valuable for users of the system because they may access the system remotely, for example to make reservations for shared vehicles, to determine if vehicles are available at a port, to determine how long a wait there is for a vehicle, to apply for membership in the vehicle sharing system or for other reasons.

The paragraph on page 28, between line 3 and line 25:

Fig. 15 is a flow diagram of the process when a user seeks a shared vehicle. As the user approaches the kiosk the system is idling, block 270. The user then swipes their

identification card at the kiosk card reader as in block 272. The card read by the kiosk card reader is the same card as used at the vehicle to gain entry, and is also the same card used to gain access to the kiosk area. The kiosk computer 5 then accesses the registration web server in block 274. When communication has been established between the registration web server 256 and the kiosk web client [250] computer 250, block 276 is executed. In block 276 user identification information, which has been obtained from the identification 10 card, along with a kiosk ID identifying the transmitting kiosk, is sent to the registration web server. Next in block 278 the registration web server 256 compares the user ID received from the kiosk web client [250] computer 250 to the active user list to see if the user is an authorized user. If 15 the user ID is invalid, block 282, the user is told, in block 284, that their user ID is not valid and the system returns to the idle state in block 270. If the User ID is valid, block 280, [then] the registration web server 256 collects the user request information in block 284. The user 20 request information consists of information such as vehicle destination, estimated time of the trip, and estimated distance of the trip. When the user information has been collected, the registration web server 256 queries the shared system database, in block 286, in order to satisfy the 25 request. In block 288 the registration web server 256 [250] selects an available vehicle from the database 258 to satisfy the user request. In block 290 the user is asked if they accept or decline the offered vehicle. If the user declines the vehicle, block 294, the registration web server 256 30 disconnects as seen in block 296. If the user accepts the

vehicle, in block 292, the registration web server 256 stores the trip request data in the shared vehicle database in block 298. Finally in block 300 a computer control process polls the vehicle request database and processes the request.

5 The paragraph between page 28, line 26, and page 29, line 7:

The computer subsystem 158 is preferably disposed in a well lit and highly visible location and, more preferably, is also housed within a building or enclosed structure 166 (as shown in Fig. 6 [2]), to which access is controlled for user security. Access may be controlled by an attendant stationed at the port facility 14 or by a standard lock and key system, wherein a key to the door 168 is issued to each user. However, in preferred embodiments, the door lock is controlled by a card key entry system and each user is issued a card key comprising a card on which magnetic, optical or other machine-readable data is recorded. In such systems, the enclosed structure 166 is provided with an electronic door lock [170 (Fig. 7)] and a card reader 172 disposed in a user accessible location outside of the structure 166, for example, adjacent the door 168.

The paragraph on page 29, between line 8 and line 17:

To gain entry to the structure 166, a user must swipe or insert the user's card key past or in the card reader 172, to allow data from the card to be read and communicated to the computer 160. The computer 160 is programmed to process the user ID and, provided user ID is in the database of currently valid users, controls the electronic door lock [170] to unlock the door 168 and allow the user to enter the structure 166. For example, the data may comprise a user identification code

or an expiration date code and the computer 160 may be programmed to compare user identification code with a database of valid user identification codes or compare the expiration date code with the current date. Thus, the computer 160 may
5 be programmed to unlock the door [172] 168, only if the user identification code is valid or an expiration date has not passed.

APPENDIX B
MARKED UP VERSION OF AMENDED CLAIMS

1. (Once Amended) A vehicle sharing system for sharing [one or more vehicles from] a fleet of vehicles, [among one or more users, the vehicle allocation system] comprising:
 - 5 a plurality of [ports, including first and second] ports at geographically remote locations relative to each [other, each port having] other;
 - 10 a user interface terminal at each port for receiving a request for a vehicle from the [fleet, each port having a vehicle search group VSG in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time] fleet; and
 - 15 a computer system coupled for communication with the user interface terminal at each port and programmed for: in response to [processing] a user request received at a first port, defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) of the first port; [and] in response [thereto, for] to at least one vehicle in the first VSG, selecting a vehicle therefrom;
 - 20 in response to no [from the VSG of the first port, if a suitable] vehicle [is present] in the first VSG, defining a second VSG of [the first port, and for] a second port;
 - 25 in response to at least one vehicle in the second VSG, selecting a vehicle therefrom; and

in response to selecting a vehicle from the second VSG, generating a relocation request of the selected vehicle from [of] the second port [port, if a suitable vehicle is not present in the VSG of] to the first [port; and means for relocating the selected vehicle to the first port, if the vehicle selected is in the VSG of the second] port.

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2. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 1, [wherein each port includes] further comprising a vehicle [parking facility at which] transport device for transporting one or more vehicles [may be parked at any given time and the VSG of a given] from one port [includes said parking facility at the] to another port.

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15 3. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 1, wherein said computer system is further programmed for including in the first VSG [of a given port further includes] vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period.

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4. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim [1] 2, wherein:
at least [some of the vehicles] one vehicle in the fleet [are provided with] includes a tow hitch [receptacles for connecting to one end of a tow bar] receptacle; and
said [means for relocating] vehicle transport device comprises a tow bar for coupling to a tow hitch receptacle and connecting two vehicles together.

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[at said second port such that both vehicles may be transported to the first port by a single driver.]

5. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim [1] 2, wherein:

5 at least [some of the vehicles] one vehicle in the fleet
[are provided with] includes a carrier hitch
receptacle; and
said [means for relocating] vehicle transport device
comprises a carrier bracket connectable to the said
carrier hitch receptacle of one vehicle, for
carrying a second vehicle.

10 6. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 5, wherein:

said carrier bracket comprises a cycle carrier bracket
for carrying a cycle; and
said second vehicle comprises a cycle.

15 7. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 1, further comprising a [port attendant] display device for displaying [a] the relocation [message] request to an attendant of the second [port, wherein] port in response
20 to said computer system [is programmed to control said display device to display a message to relocate]
generating a [vehicle to the first port, if a suitable vehicle is not present in the VSG of the first port]
relocation request.

8. (Once Amended) A method for sharing [one or more vehicles from] a fleet of vehicles, [among one or more users, the method] comprising:

providing a [user] plurality of interface terminals at a

5 plurality of [ports, including first and second]
 ports at geographically remote locations relative
 to each other;

receiving a request for a vehicle from the fleet from a
user at an interface terminal of a first port;

10 defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) for the first
 port[, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet
 may be located at any given time,] and a second
 [vehicle search group] VSG for [the] a second
 [port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet
 may be located at any given time] port;

15 selecting a vehicle from the first VSG [of the first
 port, if] in response to a suitable vehicle [is]
 present in the first VSG; [of the first port, and]
 selecting a vehicle from the second VSG [of the second
 port, if a] in response to no suitable vehicle [is
 not] present in the first VSG; [of the first port;]
 and

20 relocating the selected vehicle from the second port to
 the first [port, if the] port in response to
 selecting a vehicle [is selected] from the second
 VSG. [of the second port.]

25 9. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein
 providing a plurality of interface terminals at a
 plurality of ports further [each port] includes providing

a vehicle parking facility at [which one or more vehicles may be parked at any given time and the VSG of a given port includes said parking facility at the] each port.

10. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein
5 defining a first [the] VSG [of a given port] further includes including vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period in the first VSG.

11. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein
[at least some of the vehicles in the fleet are provided
10 with tow hitch receptacles and wherein said step of]
relocating the selected vehicle comprises:
connecting one end of a tow bar to a trailer hitch of a
first vehicle and a second end of the tow bar to a
trailer hitch of a second vehicle; and
15 towing the second vehicle with the first vehicle. [to the
first port.]

12. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein
[at least some of the vehicles in the fleet are provided
with a carrier hitch receptacle and said step of]
20 relocating the selected vehicle comprises:
connecting a carrier bracket to [the said] a carrier
hitch receptacle of a first vehicle; and
carrying a second vehicle on the carrier bracket. [to the
first port.]

25 13. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein
relocating the selected vehicle further [comprising]
includes displaying a relocation message to an attendant

of the second [port, if a suitable vehicle is not present in the VSG of the first] port.

14. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 8, wherein
5 defining [said] a second VSG includes defining the second VSG [of said first port is] different than the first VSG.
[of said second port.]

15. (Once Amended) A vehicle sharing system for sharing [one or more vehicles from] a fleet of vehicles, [among one or more users, the vehicle allocation system] comprising:

10 a plurality of [ports, including first and second] ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other, each port having a search depth vehicle search group (VSG) in which one or more available vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time for possible allocation to a user at the port;
15 a computer system programmed to determine [the] a number of [available] vehicles in [the] a first search depth VSG of [the] a first port and, [based on the number of available vehicles] in responses thereto, to determine whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the first [VSG of the first] port; and means for relocating one or more vehicles from [the] a second port to the first port, upon a determination that additional vehicles should be relocated to the first port.
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16. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein each port includes a vehicle parking facility at which one or more vehicles may be parked at any given time.

[and the VSG of a given port includes said parking facility at the port.]

17. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein the first search depth VSG [of a given port] further includes vehicles due to arrive at the first port within a preset time period based on the search depth.

5 18. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein [at least some of the vehicles in the fleet are provided with tow hitch receptacles for connecting to one end of a tow bar and] said means for relocating comprises a tow bar for connecting two vehicles together at said second port such that both vehicles may be transported to the first port by a single driver.

10 19. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 15, wherein: at least [some] one of the vehicles in the fleet [are] is provided with a carrier hitch receptacle; and said means for relocating comprises a carrier bracket connectable to the said carrier hitch receptacle of the one vehicle, for carrying a second vehicle.

15 20. (Once Amended) A system as recited in claim 15, further comprising a port attendant display device coupled for communication with said computer system and adapted for displaying a relocation message to an attendant of the second [port, wherein said computer system is programmed to control said display device to display a message to relocate a vehicle to the first port, if a suitable vehicle is not present in the VSG of the first] port.

21. (Once Amended) A method for sharing [one or more vehicles from] a fleet of vehicles among one or more users, [the method] comprising:

5 providing a plurality of [ports, including first and second] ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other;

10 defining a first vehicle search group (VSG) for [the] a first port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time, and a second [vehicle search group] VSG for [the] a second port, in which one or more vehicles from the fleet may be located at any given time;

15 determining [the] a number of available vehicles in the first VSG of [the first port] and, based on the number of available vehicles in the first VSG, determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated to the [VSG of the] first port; and relocating one or more vehicles from the second port to the first port, upon a determination that additional vehicles should be relocated to the 20 first port.

22. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein [said step of] determining [the] a number of available vehicles in the first VSG [of the first port] comprises:

25 detecting [the] a location of each vehicle in the fleet; and

determining [the] a number of vehicles within a designated area.

23. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 22, wherein [said step of] determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated comprises determining whether the [detected] number of vehicles within the designated area 5 is below a preset value.

24. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein [said step of] determining whether additional vehicles should be relocated comprises determining whether the number of available vehicles in the first VSG [of the 10 first port] is below a preset value.

25. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein [at least some of the vehicles in the fleet are provided with tow hitch receptacles and wherein said step of] relocating the [selected vehicle] one or more vehicles 15 comprises:
connecting one end of a tow bar to a trailer hitch of a first vehicle and a second end of the tow bar to a trailer hitch of a second vehicle; and towing the second vehicle with the first vehicle. [to the 20 first port.]

26. (Once Amended) A method as recited in claim 21, wherein [at least some of the vehicles in the fleet are provided with a carrier hitch receptacle and said step of] relocating one or more vehicles comprises:
25 connecting a carrier bracket to [the said] a carrier hitch receptacle of a first vehicle; and carrying a second vehicle on the carrier bracket. [to the first port.]